

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 33 No. 8

August 15, 1964

Whole No. 333



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 58

TIP TOP WEEKLY

Chronicled the career of the great Frank Merriwell and his brother, Dick Merriwell. Began April 18, 1896 and ended after 850 issues July 27, 1912, to be followed by New Tip Top Weekly. Size 7x10½ with 32 pages. Size increased to 8x11 with No. 265. The author was Gilbert Patten under the pseudonym Burt L. Standish. The stories were reprinted in Medal Library, Merriwell Series and finally in the Burt L. Standish Library.

Buffalo Bill's Life on the Border

By Paul T. Nolan

University of Southwestern Louisiana

Although most dime-novel buffs are aware that William F. (Buffalo Bill) Cody had a stage career, only a few are aware that he began his literary career writing (or collaborating in the writing of) plays. It is, moreover, safe to say that not a single Buffalo Bill collector has ever read one of Cody's plays, a condition that will soon be changed.

Buffalo Bill, who according to Colonel Charles D. Randolph, was the hero or character in 591 Buffalo Bill stories, but he first saw himself as a stage hero in 1872 when he visited New York and there saw a performance of Ned Buntline and Fred Maeder's melodrama, "Buffalo Bill." He was much pleased with the play, but when he was offered \$500 a week to play the lead, he refused. He was convinced that the director would have better luck making an actor out of a "government mule" than with him.

That winter, however, Ned Buntline started a campaign to get Cody to turn actor, and in 1873, Buffalo Bill agreed. After a hectic beginning—in which Buntline threw together a play in twenty-four hours, Buffalo Bill made his stage debut as the scout hero of "Scouts of the Plains." Cody said it was the worst play the critics had ever seen and they had maintained that if Buntline had spent twenty-four hours writing it, he must have wasted most of the day. But "Scouts of the Plains" was a smash box office hit. Buntline, however, got most of the profit, allowing Buffalo Bill only \$6000 for the year and expenses.

Cody quit, but the next year he took over the play and toured on his own.

His success continued, but the directors suggested that he add some new plays to his list. In 1876, he had an actor, J. V. Arlington "arrange" a play for the stage for him. It was called "Life on the Border" and dealt with Buffalo Bill's adventures in Kansas in the late 1860's. It is now impossible to say just how much of the writing Cody actually did on this play, but "Life on the Border" was his first attempt at authorship.

He toured with "Life on the Border," playing the leading role of Buffalo Bill, until late in 1876. At that time Capt. Jack (John Wallace) Crawford, a fellow Indian-war scout, joined his company; and Cody gave the lead in the play to him. At the same time, he added another play "The Right Red Hand," a play based on his hand-to-hand fight with Yellow Hand. Crawford played the part of Yellow Hand in that drama.

In the summer of 1877, Crawford and Cody parted company after an on-stage accident that left Capt. Jack in the hospital. For some reason, Cody gave Crawford "Life on the Border" which Capt. Jack continued to play for the next several years. Cody went on to write (or half-write) several more western melodramas—"May Cody; or Lost and Won," "Boy Chief of the Plains," "Knight of the Plains," and "Buffalo Bill at Bay; or The Pearl of the Prairie."

During this time, Buffalo Bill was planning his "Great Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders" show, and when that became a success, he quickly forgot his stage melodramas. He not only threw away the copies of all

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP, Vol. 33, No. 8, Whole No. 383, August 15, 1964
Published monthly at 821 Vermont St., Lawrence, Kansas. Edited by Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass. Second class postage paid at Lawrence, Kansas. Assistant Editor: Ralph F. Cummings, 161 Pleasant St., South Grafton, Mass. Subscription \$3.00 per year. Ad Rates—9c per word, \$1.50 per column inch; \$3.25 per quarter page, \$4.50 per half page and \$7.50 per page. Ads should be submitted by the 15th of the month in order to assure publication in the following month's issue.

the scripts he had—copies of plays that had never been published, but when he spoke of the plays themselves, it was only to ridicule them.

When those interested in his stage career started to evaluate his plays, they could only take his word that they were hopelessly confused melodramas. Not a single copy of any of his plays was known to exist.

Strangely enough, however, his old sometimes-friend, sometimes-foe, Capt. Jack Crawford had kept the copy of "Life on the Border" that Cody had given him in a formal ceremony. During the spring of 1964, Crawford's great grand-daughter, Mrs. Buford Richardson of Socorro, New Mexico, discovered the copy of the play in an old trunk.

She has made the play available, and the Pioneer Drama Service now plans to make an edition of the play available during the fall of 1964.

Those who like the Buffalo Bill story will find "Life on the Border" to their taste. Many of the same episodes—Cody's hand-to-hand fight with a grizzly bear, his capture of the counterfeiting ring, his wars with the

Indians—which are used over and over again in the dime novels about him form the action of the play. Those who took Cody seriously when he said "Life on the Border" drove critics crazy because it had neither head nor tail and "it didn't make any difference at which act we began" will be surprised. Whatever else may be said about "Life on the Border," it has a clear-cut story line. In fact, it is much better plotted than most of his autobiographical works and the novels.

Buffalo Bill in one way never took his writing seriously, but it is probably true that when his attention turned to the Wild West show, he was also doing the best he could to change the show-going habits of people from the stage to the open arena. It is too bad—at least for those who find pleasure in the Buffalo Bill stories—that he destroyed all of the plays, but as the history of the hand-written manuscript that he gave Capt. Jack demonstrates, Buffalo Bill's plays may be tougher than he thought. "Life on the Border" has out-lived his ire, and not many "enemies" of Buffalo Bill could say that.

GOLDEN ARGOSY

By Stanley A. Pachon

(Continued from last issue)

The issue of December 20, 1884, Volume 3, Number 3, was a premium number, it carried no stories and was the last of such numbers.

With the first issue of Volume 5 dated December 4, 1886, can be seen the effects of the sudden prosperity. The pages were reduced somewhat in size, being now 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ x14 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The pages were increased to 16, more illustrations were being used and six serials were running in every issue as well as more short stories and articles. There were four columns to a page. The price was raised to six cents a copy and no longer did Munsey have to depend upon English sources to supply him with stories.

The old favorite authors began to contribute so many new stories that Munsey printed a number of these under pen names, giving the impression of his large corps of writers. The masthead no longer carried the subtitle "Freighted with Treasures for Boys and Girls." This had been dropped with the issue of March 13, 1886. All in all, Munsey did feel that he had an exceptional story paper to offer the youth of America. So in the fall of 1887 he launched his greatest advertising campaign. Employing a large force he blanketed the whole country with sample copies which were distributed by his workers. In the five months that the drive continued he printed and distributed the record number of 11,500,000 sample copies of

the Golden Argosy. To add impetus he began writing and printing his new serial, "The Boy Broker" which alone added 20,000 circulation to his total.

In January 1887 the "Golden Argosy" absorbed the "Boys' World" which had been started about a year before by Matthew White, Jr., and who now joined the Munsey staff. He became the editor of Golden Argosy in 1889. Just a few months earlier Richard H. Titherington who had been contributing some articles to the Golden Argosy joined the editorial staff. He later became the editor of Munsey's Magazine.

With the expansion of the Golden Argosy in full swing Munsey was proudly announcing that he was printing well over 100,000 copies of the Golden Argosy every week but no statement was given as to how many of these were actually sold.

Although the money was coming in, Munsey was not entirely satisfied. In spite of his best efforts he could not boost his circulation above a certain figure. At that time he was not aware of the fact that he had reached a saturation point for this type of publication, making it necessary to always recruit new readers. Every few years his youthful readers outgrew this type of publication. So he began to experiment. The issue of November 24, 1888 Whole Number 312 was the last of the large issues. The following week, December 1, the Argosy appeared in new format, the size was cut down to 8½x10½ inches. The number of pages was increased to 32. Two columns to the page, in place of the large illustrations of the past volume, many smaller ones were scattered among the serials and short stories. For the first time the Argosy acquired covers. The "Golden" was dropped from the title for as Munsey explained to his readers the simple title of the "Argosy" had a manly ring, that the word "Golden" gave the impression that the periodical was for very small children. Twenty-six numbers made up the new volume in place of the 52 numbers which made up the preceding volumes, and the price was boosted to 10 cents

a copy.

While his Argosy was still producing revenue, Munsey decided to branch out into other publishing ventures assuming correctly now that the prosperity of the Argosy was a transitory one. On February 2, 1889 appeared his Munsey Weekly, a 36 page humorous paper selling at ten cents a copy, which for the first 30 months would eat up the Argosy profits and put its publisher deeper in debt. Another venture was into book publishing; noting a steady demand for certain stories that appeared as Argosy serials he decided to reprint them in book form to appear monthly. The first of these was "The Mountain Cave," by George H. Coomer and was dated August 1889. After 21 numbers, not all published on a regular monthly schedule, the book business was sold to Frank F. Lovell Co. who later issued them as the Leather Clad Tales. These were later taken over by the newly formed U. S. Book Co. which continued them with additions. The Munsey's Popular Series as it was called by its original publisher were paper clads and sold for 25 cents a copy.

Meanwhile the Argosy with the first number of the new size (313) December 1, 1888, had its publishing name changed from Frank A. Munsey, Publisher to Frank A. Munsey & Co., Publishers, indicating that others had acquired an interest in the firm. This was carried to October 4, 1890 (No. 409) when it again became Frank A. Munsey, Publisher.

With Volume 7 of the new size the number of pages varied between the issues, some were 32 pages, but there were issues with 36, 40 and even 42 pages. The number of pages in the 26 issues of Volume 8 were stabilized at 32. With Volume 9 the number of pages were cut somewhat; some issues carried 28, 30 and 32 pages. Volume 10 saw further cuts. Some issues were of 22, 26 and 28 pages. Starting with Volume 11, the first issue dated November 29, 1890 (No. 417), the issues were cut to 16 and 18 pages. The price was reduced to 5 cents a copy.

Munsey, to justify his cuts in the number of pages, stated that although the number of pages had been cut, the amount of reading was substantially the same but his readers after comparing the preceding volumes with Volume 11 would probably not agree with him.

Early in 1891, Munsey moved his activities into the newspaper field. He had acquired the New York Star which he promptly renamed the Daily Continent. This can be safely stated was the first of the modern tabloid newspapers. Copies were sold at 2 cents for the daily and 5 cents for the Sunday edition. But his excursion into journalism was both brief and unsuccessful. The first issue of the Daily Continent was dated February 1, 1891 and the issue dated June 7, 1891 was the last to appear under Munsey's name before passing on to other parties and leaving him saddled with an additional debt of over \$40,000. With the acquisition of the Daily Continent, Munsey had moved his periodicals over to the Daily Continent office at 233 Broadway, Corner of Park Avenue. But after his failure in the newspaper field he was forced to move to a new address at 155 East 23rd Street.

Meanwhile both the Argosy and Munsey's Weekly were not progressing satisfactorily. Taking Munsey's Weekly he made it into a Monthly magazine, the first issue in this new format was dated October 1891, Volume 6, Number 1. It contained 96 pages, carried some fiction and with many well illustrated articles and was priced at 25 cents a copy. But in spite of his efforts the magazine did not catch on. He then decided to drastically reduce the price to 10 cents a copy and after advertising this fact heavily the magazine began to forge ahead from an initial printing of 20,000 copies for the October 1893 issue. The demand for the magazine boomed and by the end of 1897 he was printing well over 700,000 copies a month.

The Argosy was also changed. The issue dated August 22, 1891, Volume 12, Whole Number 455 was the last

of the small size issues. The week after, August 29, 1891, Volume 13 Whole Number 456, the Argosy blossomed out with a new heading designed by Charles Howard Johnson. It was 10x13 inches and contained 14 pages. The first page was of three columns while the balance of the pages carried four columns. Each issue carried on the average six illustrations. The price was 5 cents a copy and the volume was made up of 26 numbers. The periodical had much more reading matter than the preceding volumes of the small size. Stories by some of the old favorites were published as well as the budding efforts of some of the newer writers, among them Edward Stratemeyer. The untiring efforts of Alger continued to appear week after week. In the issue of November 7, 1891 appeared an ad offering 1000 shares of capital stock at \$100 a share of his publications. Munsey promised that the investment would double in value in one year. This ad was carried for a number of weeks and then dropped. Munsey must have secured the necessary capital for with the issue of February 6, 1892, the company name was changed to Frank A. Munsey & Co., Publishers.

The Argosy continued in this form to and including Volume 17. Toward the end of Volume 17 the quality of the magazine began to slip and the number of illustrations were dropped to two per issue. The last of the large weekly issues was dated March 24, 1894, Volume 17, Whole Number 590, with 31 issues making up the volume. In this same issue Munsey states that the success of Munsey's Magazine has prompted him to change over the Argosy from a weekly story paper to a monthly magazine, but the change was also necessitated by the drop in circulation for it had reached the lowest point of its career, dropping to about 9,000 copies per issue in 1894. The next issue in its new form was dated April 1894, Volume 18, Number 1. The whole numbering of the issues was dropped. Six issues now comprised a volume, the price was set at 10 cents

a copy. Size 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches with 112 pages and an illustrated cover. Five serials as well as a large number of well illustrated articles and a number of short stories made up the issues. There were a few new departments started but were dropped, some soon-er and some later. With the issue of December, 1894, the address had been changed to 149 and 151 Fifth Avenue.

With Volume 20, May 1895, the number of pages was cut to 96 and with the September 1895 issue down to 92 pages, but with the October 1895 issue (Vol. 21 No. 1) the number of pages was again increased to 96 and with the January 1896 issue back to 112. The issue for April 1896 was further increased to 128 pages. In April 1896 the address of the Munsey Publications was at 111 Fifth Avenue.

The magazine continued to limp along as a juvenile publication until Volume 23, with the first number of this volume dated October 1896, Munsey decided to leave the juvenile field and the magazine became an all fiction "pulp." The magazine took on a more adult look, all the pictured articles were dropped and no illustrations were used and the number of pages were increased to 192. Most of the serials were former Argosy stories with changed titles. Another change was a complete novel average 60 single column pages in each issue. A number of short stories both new and reprint were used as well as some poetry used principally as fillers. Six issues made up this volume but with succeeding volumes the number issues to a volume was reduced to four. When the stock of the more adult type of stories from the juvenile Argosy ran out, more and more new serials were inserted. The last serial from the juvenile Argosy was reprinted in Volume 27 and concluded in Volume 29. After that all new stories were used. The reprinting of the short stories continued a while longer and they, too were dropped. With the change to an adult all fiction magazine the circulation of the Argosy continued to gain steadily. Around 1907 500,000 copies

were being printed for each issue.

The Argosy had finally justified the hopes of its founder but not in the field it was originally launched. It is the only Munsey periodical surviving today.

From 1894 to 1907 inclusive his magazines earned him over \$8,000,000 net profits and when he died in New York City December 22, 1925, he left an estate appraised at \$19,747,687.00! To a large extent the accolade of an "Alger Hero" can be safely laid on the shoulders of Frank A. Munsey; even Alger would have agreed with this.

Material on the English edition of Golden Argosy supplied by Denis R. Rogers, for which my sincere thanks.

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